

IV. A. 4.

EVOLUTION OF THE WAR

US TRAINING OF THE VIETNAMESE
NATIONAL ARMY, 1954 - 1959

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TV. A. 4.

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¹Report of the Saigon Military Mission (SMM), August 1954-August 1955 (S).

²JCS telegram to CINCPAC 974202, 30 March 1960; JCSM-906-60, 15 September 1960. Cf., Duncanson, Dennis J., Government and Revolution in Vietnam, 1968, pp. 290-305.

³J. Lawton Collins, Special Representative of the United States in Vietnam, "Report on Vietnam for the National Security Council," January 20, 1955 (TS). See also NSC documents throughout the period 1950-1960 which are consistent with this statement of objectives and consequences.

⁴The key to this problem [the Indochina war] is a strong and effective Nationalist army with the support of the populace behind it. Debriefing, M/General Thomas J. H. Trapnell, Jr., 3 May 1954, in OSD files 092/092.2 Indochina. U.S. decisionmakers seemed to agree virtually unanimously with this statement.

⁵In April 1953 CHMAAG General Trapnell reported that French observers had returned from Korea with little but a list of reasons why U.S. training procedures could not be effectively applied in Indochina. Msg, CHMAAG Indochina to AC of S G-3 and CINFE, MG619A, DA-IN-257701, 15 April 53. Although the minutes of the Bipartite U.S.-French Conversations (First Session, April 22, 1953, 3:30 p.m., Quai d'Orsay) reported that "The French missions which have been received in Korea were very useful. Marshall Juin himself has brought back information the French propose to use in the formation of the Vietnam army," the qualifiers added, even at this high diplomatic level ("But the problem is not the same in Indochina as in Korea. The problems facing the two armies are not comparable, but some lessons can be applied") lend weight to the Trapnell interpretation that the French visits to Korea had been largely a waste of time (S).

⁶This plan, outlined to then Chargé d'Affaires Gullion, was dismissed as "fantastic," although it was seen that this Vietnamese attitude raised serious problems. Msg, Gullion to Acheson, 204, 25 March 1950 (S). History of the Indochina Incident, Historical Section, JCS. Series B, 1 February 1955 (TS). (Hereinafter referred to as JCS History.) In May 1954, Ngo Dinh Luyen, Bao Dai's personal representative, told Philip W. Bonsal that Bao Dai seeks U.S. help for the National Army. Memcon, May 18 and 20, 1954 (TS), OSD Files 1954.

⁷Memorandum for SECDEF from Service Secretaries, "Draft State Department Statement on Indochina, dated 27 March 1952," 8 April 1952 (TS).

⁸Memorandum for Record, "Meeting of President's Special Committee on Indochina, 29 January 1954," 30 January 1954 (TS).

9 Report by the Ad Hoc Committee to the Assistant to the Secretary for International Security Affairs..., "ND, Encl to (TS) Memorandum, Acting SECDEF to Service Secretaries, "Forty Additional Vietnam Battalions," 19 February 1953.

10 JCS History.

11 Msg, CHMAAG IC to CSUSA, MG 1651 DA, 091515Z June 54, DA-IN-64188 (9 June 1954) (S).

12 Msg, Murphy to AmEmb (Paris), TOSEC 392, 10 June 1954 (TS).

13 Msg, SECSTATE to Amb (Paris), 4551, TEDUL 191, 12 June 1954 (TS).

14 JCS History.

15 Memorandum for SECDEF from JCS, "Suspension of U.S. Military Aid to Indochina in Event of a Cease-Fire," April 30, 1954; Memorandum from SECDEF to Service Secretaries and JCS, July 30, 1954.

16 Msg, CHMAAG Indochina to DEPTAR, Mg 2062A, 271130Z July 1954, DA-IN-74737, (TS). JCS History. Although interpretations of the Geneva Agreements with regard to ceilings as they applied to U.S. military forces varied, the Department of State interpreted the agreement as fixing the number of forces at or below the level existing on 11 August 1954.

17 JCS History.

18 Memorandum for SECDEF, "U.S. Assumption of Training Responsibilities in Indochina," 4 August 1954 (S).

19 Letter, SECDEF to SECSTATE, 12 August 1954 (S).

20 Memorandum SECSTATE to SECDEF, 18 August 1954 (S). JCS History.

21 Memorandum for SECDEF from JCS, "U.S. Assumption of Training Responsibilities in Indochina," 22 September 1954 (TS).

22 Memorandum for SECDEF from JCS, "Retention and Development of Forces in Vietnam," 22 September 1954 (TS).

23 Memorandum for SECDEF from JCS, "Retention and Development of Forces in Indochina," 22 September 1954 (TS).

24 Memorandum, SECSTATE to SECDEF, October 11, 1954 (TS).

25 Memorandum, SECDEF from JCS, "Development and Training of Indigenous Forces in Indochina," 19 October 1954 (TS).

26 Msg, SECSTATE to AmEmb (Saigon) 1679, 22 October 1954 (TS).

27 Memorandum, SECDEF to JCS, 26 October 1954 (TS).

28 "With reference to the question of training Vietnamese forces the Joint Chiefs' of Staff desire to point out that in addition to the current unstable political situation in Vietnam the terms of the Geneva Armistice Agreement have been interpreted to limit the strength of MAAG, Indochina to 342 personnel. Even if all these military personnel were replaced by U.S. civilians to perform the normal functions of the MAAG and the military personnel were thereby released for training duties only, the number of U.S. personnel would permit only limited participation in the over-all training program. Under these conditions, U.S. participation in training not only would probably have but limited beneficial effect but also would assure responsibility for any failure of the program." (Italics added). Memorandum for SECDEF from JCS, "Development and Training of Indigenous Forces in Indochina," 19 October 1954 (TS)

29 James M. Gavin, Crisis Now, p. 49.

30 Memorandum to SECDEF from JCS, "Indochina," 17 November 1954 (TS).

31 NSC Record of Action 131b, 27 January 1955 (TS). JCS History. Memorandum, SECDEF to Service Secretaries and JCS, "Report on Vietnam for the NSC," 3 February 1955 (TS).

32 NIE 63-7-54, 23 November 1954 (S). Excluded from this estimate are those Hoa Hao forces under the control of the VNA or the French.

33 Report to SECSTATE by J. Lawton Collins, Special Representative in Vietnam, January 20, 1955 (TS).

34 Discussions with a member of US MAAG in 1954-1955 period (U).

35 "...the government by force and bribery has drastically reduced the importance of these groups to challenge its authority." NIE 63.1-3-55, 11 October 1955. "All significant sect resistance in South Vietnam has been eliminated...." NIE 63-56, 17 July 1956. (S).

36 NIE 63-5-54, 3 August 1954. (S).

37 Ibid.

38 NIE 63-7-54, 23 November 1954 (S).

39 In fact, many estimates failed to make any distinction between northern and southern forces. See MAAG Narrative Statement dated August 23, 1958 (S), which estimated "Viet Cong strength in North Vietnam" at 268,000.

40 For particularly detailed estimates of Viet Minh organization in South Vietnam, see Department of State documents, "The Communist Subversive Threat in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos," DR/SP 57.1, December 29, 1955 (S); and "The Communist Subversive Threat to the SEATO Treaty Areas, II. The Subversive Threat in South Vietnam," DRP SP-62, October 24, 1956 (S).

41 NIE 91, 4 June 1953 (S).

42 NIE 63-7-54, 23 November 1954 (S).

43 NIE 63.1-2-55, 26 April 1955 (TS).

44 NIE 63-5-54, 3 August 1954 (Italics added) (S).

- 45 NIE 63-7-54, 23 November 1954 (S).
- 46 Minutes of Meeting between President Diem and Deputy Secretary Quarles, 10 May 1957, 15 May 1957 (S).
- 47 Memorandum for SECDEF, "U.S. Policy in the Event of a Reversal of Aggression in Vietnam," 9 September 1955 (TS).
- 48 NIE 14.3/53-61, 15 August 1961 (S).
- 49 Memorandum, SECSTATE to SECDEF, October 11, 1954 (TS).
- 50 See Note 27 above.
- 51 Memorandum for SECDEF from JCS, "Development of Defense Information Relating to Certain U.S. Aid Programs (Vietnam)," 13 April 1956 (TS).
- 52 See, for example, T. W. Kaufmann, The McNamara Strategy, esp. Chapter I.
- 53 Memo for SECDEF from JCS, "Studies with Respect to Possible U.S. Action Regarding Indochina," 26 May 1954 (TS).
- 54 Memorandum for SECDEF from the JCS, "Concept and Plans for the Implementation, If Necessary, of Article IV, 1, of the Manila Pact," 11 February 1955 (TS), paragraphs 6 and 7.
- 55 Ibid., paragraphs 6-9.
- 56 Memorandum for SECDEF from JCS, "Military Consultation under the Southwest Asia Collective Defense Treaty," 8 October 1954 (TS).
- 57 Memorandum for SECDEF from JCS, "Concept and Plans for the Implementation, If Necessary, of Article IV, 1, of the Manila Pact," 11 February 1955 (TS).
- 58 Memorandum for SECDEF from JCS, "Development and Training of Indigenous Forces in Indochina," 19 October 1954 (TS).
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 NSC 5612/1, September 5, 1956 (TS). "The NSC at its meeting on 7 June 1956 h. Noted that the President's view that it would be desirable for appropriate U.S. military authorities: (1) to encourage Vietnamese military planning for defense against external aggression along lines consistent with U.S. planning concepts based upon U.S. policy." Memorandum for Service Secretaries and JCS, from ASD(ISA) "Capability to Deal with Local Aggression in Vietnam," no date (TS). "Limited initial resistance" was subsequently defined as "resistance to Communist aggression by defending or deploying in such in such manner as to preserve and maintain the integrity of the government and its armed forces for the period of time required to invoke the UN Charter, and/or Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty or the period of time required for the U.S. Government to determine that considerations of national security require unilateral U.S. assistance and to commit U.S. or collective security forces...." Memorandum for SECDEF from JCS, "U.S. Policy in Mainland Southeast Asia," 21 December 1956 (TS).

61 From December 1955 on, MAAG reports either implicitly or explicitly assigned the counter-aggression mission to the Vietnamese Army. In December 1955 the MAAG reported that the VNA would have the capability to delay a Viet Minh attack across the 17th parallel for 60 days following a year's concentrated training of a 10-division force. MAAG Country Statement for 1955, December 1955 (S).

62 SNIE 63-6-54, 15 September 1954 (S).

63 cf. particularly "Report of the SPEN August 1954-August 1955 (S). By April 1956, NIE 63.1-2-55 (TS) reported that "French policy is openly committed to the replacement of Diem at the earliest possible opportunity...." Although U.S. policy toward Diem was variable, French policy, however negative, seemed to enjoy the virtue of consistency.

64 NIE 63.1-2-55, 26 April 1955 (TS).

65 Ely, Général D'Armée Paul, Memoires, L'Indochine Dans La Tourmente, Chapters XI and XII.

66 Msg, Heath to SECSTATE, 1761, 8 November 1954 (S); Msg, Collins sgd Kidder to SECSTATE, 1830, 15 November 1954, DA-IN-99015 (16 November) (TS). JCS History.

67 Msg, ROA Washington sgd Stassen to USAMB Paris, USAMB Saigon, USFOTO 263, 24 November 1954 (C). JCS History.

68 Msg, Dillon to SECSTATE, 2433, 8 December 1954 (TS). JCS History.

69 NIE 63.1-3-55, 11 October 1955 (S).

70 JCS History.

71 NIE 63.1-3-55, 11 October 1955 (S).

72 New York Times, May 12, 1955.

73 Denis Warner, The Last Confucian, pp. 107-108.

74 Matthew B. Ridgway, The Korean War, p. 191.

75 NIE 63-7-54, 23 November 1954 (S).

76 Memorandum for SECDEF from JCS, "Retention and Development of Forces in Indochina," 22 September 1954 (TS).

77 Msg, Collins sgd Kidder to SECSTATE, 1830, 15 November 1954, DA-IN-99015, (16 November) (TS), JCS History.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.

80 Memorandum for SECDEF from JCS, "Indochina," 17 November 1954 (TS).

81 Report to SECSTATE from J. Lawton Collins, Special Representative in Vietnam, "Report on Vietnam for the National Security Council," January 20, 1955 (TS). The above is from "Supplement to the Report on Vietnam by Gen. J. Lawton Collins," (S).

82 TRIM Briefing, in "Report of Visit of Lt. General Bruce C. Clarke, Commanding General, U.S. Army Pacific to Western Pacific and Southeast Asia, 6-29 September 1955," (S). JCS History.

83 The theme of diversion of the VNA from training by combat runs throughout the period. The reduction of French participation in TRIM is revealed by the following table: TRIM Officer Strengths, March 1955-March 1956 [Source: "Study on Army Aspects of the Military Assistance Program in Vietnam," U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1 June 1960, (S)].

	<u>U.S. Officers</u>	<u>French Officers</u>
3/55	68	209
5/55	121	225
7/55	124	108
9/55	125	66
11/55	142	58
1/56	149	53
3/56	189	0

84 Msg, CHMAAG Indochina to CINCPAC, 091330Z, August 1955 (TS).

JCS History.

85 Memorandum for SECDEF from JCS, "Revised Force Base for Vietnam," 19 August 1955 (TS). In his memorandum of 29 July 1955 to the JCS requesting JCS evaluation of the 150,000 force basis, Actg ASD(ISA) questioned the inclusion of the mission "to check external aggression," insisting that circumstances if it is to be acceptable to U.S. Government authorities." (TS) Subsequent DOD approval of this force level constituted, in effect, approval of the counter-aggression mission.

86 JCS History.

87 Actual Strengths of Vietnamese forces was as follows: [Source: "Study on Army Aspects...", U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1 June 1960, p. C-5 (S)].

	<u>Army</u>	<u>Navy</u>	<u>Air Force</u>
1/55	170,000	1,500	3,500
1/56	152,000	4,200	3,400
1/57	138,600	4,900	3,500
1/58	131,500	4,900	3,500
1/59	135,500	5,000	4,600
12/59	132,000	5,200	4,800

88. Large excesses of equipment in Vietnam resulted from the decrease in numbers of both the FEC and the VNA; the VNA were totally incapable of assuming logistical responsibility, and the withdrawal of the FEC resulted in the dumping of mountains of equipment on the Vietnamese; further, the French were confronted with a deteriorating situation in North Africa and were concerned with salvaging the best equipment for their own use and refused to allow U.S. personnel into their installations and supply dumps to inventory both the qualitative and quantitative status of inventory. ["Study on Army Aspects...", U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1 June 1960, pp. D-6 - D-8. (S)].

89. Msg, CHMAAG Indochina to CNA, MG125A 100810A February 1955, DA-IN-117629 (S). JCS History.

90. Memorandum for SECDEF, "Raising U.S. Military Personnel Ceiling of MAAG Vietnam," 9 December 1955 (S).

91. Letter, SECDEF to SECSTATE, 13 December 1956 (S).

92. Memorandum for SECDEF from ASD(ISA), 25 January 1956; letter, SECDEF to SECSTATE, January 31, 1956 (S).

93. See letter from Deputy Under Secretary of State to SECDEF dated 1 May 1956 (S) which details restrictions on TERM as well as summarizing State Department views regarding TERM.

94. TERM per se was disbanded and its personnel assigned to MAAG in 1960. By some TERM was labelled a "subterfuge" from the military point of view (see "Study on Army Aspects..." pp. D-1FF); that it was probably also a useful subterfuge from an intelligence point of view is revealed by Allen W. Dulles' strong endorsement of SECDEF's desire to augment MAAG Vietnam, which concludes his statement regarding the need for additional CIA slots under military cover in Vietnam. Memorandum for SECSTATE from Director, CIA, 16 December 1955 (S).

95. JCS History.

96. MAAG Country Statement for Vietnam and Laos as of 31 December 1955 (S). *Italics added.*

97. viz. MAAG statements: "Permanent reorganization...along U.S. lines and associated regroupment is not yet complete" (31 December 1955); "Continuing reorganization and regroupment...along U.S. lines.... The reorganization and realignment of the logistical base upon U.S. lines has been slow...." (30 June 1956); "While continuing reorganization and training along U.S. lines...." (12 December 1956); "Reorganization of the Vietnamese Army along U.S. lines is progressing but is not yet complete...." (30 June 1957); "Reorganization of the Vietnamese Army along U.S. lines is progressing but is not yet complete.... TOE's and TD's for ARVN units have been prepared by MAAG and forwarded to ARVN for review." (31 December 1957); "Most of the desirable elements of the United States system, as they apply to the Vietnamese Armed Forces, will eventually be reflected in the procedures used by Army." (24 August 1958); "The training being conducted is generally along U.S. lines...." (25 November 1958 - 31 March 1959). (All S).

98 MAAG Vietnam Narrative Statement, November 1958, revised to include all changes through 31 March 1959 (S). Apparently the NVA was excluded from this comparison.

99 "Preferably, two U.S. advisory personnel should be assigned to each battalion size unit." MAAG Country Statement, 30 June 1956 (S). Authorized Advisor positions were as follows:

AUTHORIZED NUMBER OF ADVISORS, AUTHORIZED STRENGTH PER UNIT
[Source: Research Analysis Corporation, Cost Analysis of Counterinsurgency Land Combat Operations: Vietnam, 1957-1964 (U) Volume II, Appendix G, pp. 210-211, August 1967 (S)]

	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961
Corps	-	5(5)	10(5)	15(5)	15(5)	100(33)
Division	30(3)	30(3)	30(3)	35(5)	35(5)	35(4)
Regiment	35(1)	35(1)	31(1)	26(1)	26(1)	29(1)
Battalion	-	-	-	-	-	672(7)
Abn Brigade	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	1(1)	4(4)
Ranger Co.	-	-	-	7(7)	7(7)	18(5)
Schools and Tng Centers	26(6)	26(6)	26(6)	22(6)	22(6)	42(3)
Sectors	-	-	-	-	-	39(1)
Total	92(11)	97(16)	98(16)	106(25)	106(25)	939(53.5)

Available information does not permit accounting for the balance of MAAG strength for any of the years considered. According to RAG, "There are no data available on the actual number of U.S. Army advisors in the RVN before 30 November 1961."

100 MAAG Vietnam Narrative Statement, November 1958, revised to include all changes through November 1959 (S).

101 Ibid.

102 "The fact that the army marched, as it were, on its Counterpart Fund did not secure its exclusion from politics after all, therefore, and in the end the army killed Ngo Dinh Diem when the U.S. suspended the CIP in order to bring him to his senses." Duncanson, op.cit., p. 293.

103 "...discipline was affected by distaste to inflict punishment on the slack or insubordinate and, with that, loss of face, so that such misdemeanors as absence without leave (outright desertion was rare) and neglect to carry out operational orders became very common." Ibid.; p. 290.

104 Memorandum, Dr. Edward W. Weidner to Mr. Leland Barrows, USOM, "Recommendation for American and Vietnamese Action Re Civil Security," October 11, 1955.

- 105 NIE 63-56 (S).
- 106 MAAG Country Statement for Vietnam as of 31 December 1956, pp. 12 and 13 (S).
- 107 MAAG Vietnam Country Statement for Vietnam as of 31 December 1957 (S), p. 16.
- 108 "Report on the Proposed Organization of the Law Enforcement Agencies of the RVN," MSU Police Advisory Staff, Saigon, Vietnam, April 1956.
- 109 Despatch, Saigon to State 276, 4 January 1960 (S).
- 110 Despatch, Saigon to State, 400, 29 May 1959 (S). JCS History.
- 111 The best available account of the Civil Guard dispute is contained in John D. Montgomery, The Politics of Foreign Aid, pp. 64-70.
- 112 PACOM Weekly Intelligence Digest 30-58 (S).
- 113 Page C-22.
- 114 Duncanson, op. cit., p. 305.
- 115 Speaking in 1954, President Eisenhower gave eloquent testimony to this type of reasoning: "If you could win a big one, you would certainly win a little one." (Quoted in Kaufmann, op. cit., p. 25).
- 116 PACOM Weekly Intelligence Digest, 18 May 1956 (S), p. 16.
- 117 Ibid., p. 17.
- 118 Report of the SSM, August 1954-August 1955 (S). This Mission, headed by then Colonel Edward Lansdale, USAF, was particularly concerned with unorthodox methods of combatting the Communists. Colonel Lansdale subsequently served as a member of TRIM under O'Daniel, but his activities were specialized.
- 119 e.g., "Tactical unit personnel and equipment have been employed on numerous occasions in the government's agricultural land development program, civilian relocation and resettlement program and in pacification and security missions. Such operations reduce the effectiveness of formal training programs.... The Civil Guard should eventually assume complete responsibility for internal security of the nation." MAAG Narrative Statement, November 1958 (S), revised to include changes through 31 March 1959 (S).
- 120 Consider, for example, not only U.S. efforts to establish clear lines of authority from the GVN to its armed forces, but also that no discussion has been found in the available data pertaining to the desirability of a complete tri-service establishment, complete with a Marine Corps.
- 121 Army Information Digest, November 1960, pp. 36-37.

122, "Why U.S. is Losing in Vietnam," U.S. News and World Report, November 9, 1964, p. 64.

123, "The Practical Demands of MAAG," Lt. General Samuel T. Williams, Military Review, Vol. 41, No. 7, July 1961, p. 7.

124, Duncanson, op. cit., p. 293.

125, John Necklin, Mission in Torment, p. 12.

126, Cost Analysis of Counterinsurgency Land Combat Operations: Vietnam 1957-1964 (U), Research Analysis Corporation, RAC 7D-232, August 1967, Vol. II, pp. 54-56.

127, "The Armored School South Vietnam," Armor, January-February 1958, pp. 42-43; also MAAG Country Statement for Vietnam and Laos as of 31 December 1955, p. 25 (S).

128, "For some reason," wrote General Samuel T. Williams, "many advisors seem more ready to assist in drawing up division and corps problems than they are in building and supervising problems for the smaller unit." Military Review, Vol. 41, July 1961, p. 13.

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